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**CYCLING | Page 2**

Pogacar back in 'special' yellow after Tour stage three victory



**TENNIS | Page 3**

Cobolli, Paolini keep bubbling into quarters, Fery stays afloat

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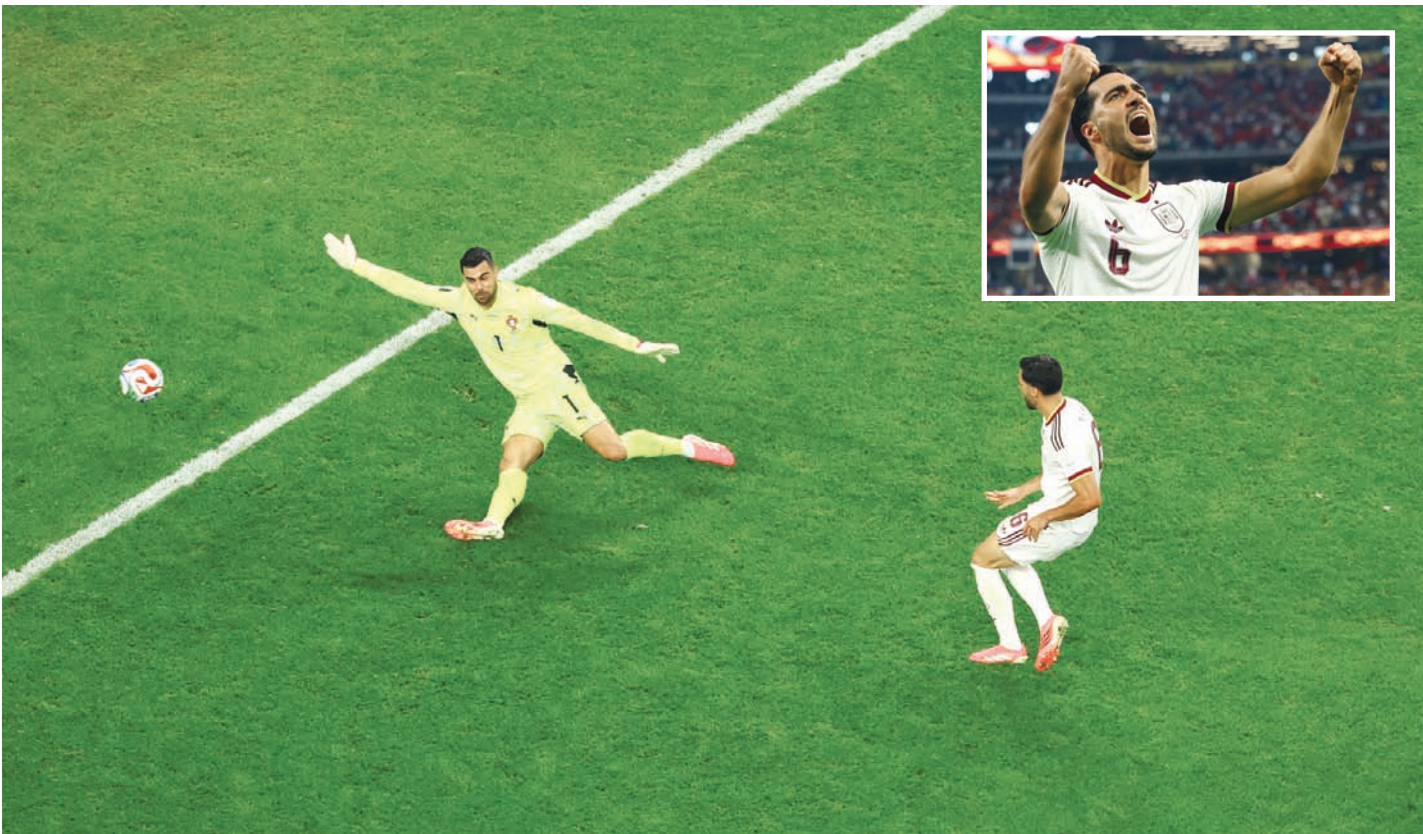
# GULF TIMES SPORT



## MATCH REPORT

# Sub Merino strikes late as Spain edge Portugal to enter quarters

SPAIN'S 1-0 WIN BRINGS CURTAINS DOWN ON RONALDO'S WORLD CUP CAREER



Mikel Merino (also inset) of Spain fires past Portugal goalkeeper Diogo Costa during the FIFA World Cup 2026 Round of 16 match at Dallas Stadium in Arlington, Texas, yesterday. (AFP)



Cristiano Ronaldo looked dejected as Portugal was eliminated from the World Cup yesterday. (Reuters)

**AFP**  
Arlington, United States

Substitute Mikel Merino scored a late winner to put Spain in the quarter-finals with a 1-0 victory over Portugal and end Cristiano Ronaldo's World Cup career yesterday. The European champions will face the United States - the only one of the co-hosts remaining - or Belgium on Friday in Los Angeles. In front of an expectant crowd of 70,649 at the air-conditioned home of the Dallas Cowboys, a

match that on paper promised so much failed to really deliver.

Extra time looked certain, before fellow substitute Ferran Torres slipped in Merino to settle the contest in the first minute of injury time. It meant a sour final World Cup match for the 41-year-old Ronaldo, now playing in Saudi Arabia, having confirmed on the eve of the encounter that this would be his last dance on football's biggest stage.

The neighbours came into the contest both unbeaten, but while Portugal had not been entirely convincing, Spain had not even

conceded a goal in the tournament. One of the pre-tournament favourites, they still haven't.

For all their pedigree, talent and history, Spain have only lifted the World Cup once, in 2010, while Portugal's best was third place in 1966.

In Ronaldo and Spain's 18-year-old Barcelona prodigy Lamine Yamal, the last-16 showdown was touted as a showcase of two extraordinary talents at opposite ends of their careers.

There was a sombre moment shortly before kickoff when a black-and-white image of the

late Portugal forward Diogo Jota flashed up on the giant screen that looms over the field.

### Ronaldo cheered, jeered

Spain should have been ahead with less than 10 minutes gone when Dani Olmo played in Mikel Oyarzabal but with only goalkeeper Diogo Costa to beat, he somehow pulled it well wide.

Portugal skipper Ronaldo had his first chance to add to his three goals in North America, stinging the palms of goalkeeper Unai Simon from a tight angle.

Luis de la Fuente's Spain

cranked up the pressure, Yamal and Alex Baena testing Costa twice in quick succession, the second a wonderful fingertip save.

Ronaldo - jeered and cheered in equal measure -- was a marginal presence in the central attacking role he now occupies in the twilight of his career.

Portugal ended the half on top and Roberto Martinez's side were inches from taking the lead when Spain full-back Pedro Porro stuck out his head and directed a Nuno Mendes shot onto his own crossbar.

The winger Yamal had endured

a frustrating time up against Mendes, but the Paris Saint-Germain fullback was forced off injured after 56 minutes in a blow to Portugal.

The game needed a spark and Ronaldo, well known to Spain from his time at Real Madrid, threw up his arms when a pass went astray.

Martinez made double changes on 71 and 83 minutes, but kept Ronaldo on.

And in a game that was cagey, Arsenal midfielder Merino won it at the death with a composed finish that was out of keeping with much of what went on before.

## PREVIEW

# Battle-hardened Argentina, Egypt set for last-16 clash

**Reuters**  
Kansas City, Missouri

Argentina and Egypt head into their World Cup last-16 clash today in Atlanta with little time to recover after both survived gruelling physical tests in their first knockout matches.

Reigning champions Argentina needed extra time to edge World Cup debutants Cape Verde 3-2 on Friday, while Egypt endured 120 minutes before defeating Australia 4-2 in a penalty shootout after a 1-1 draw.

The quick turnaround has raised concerns for both teams, but particularly for Argentina, whose previously flawless campaign showed signs of vulnerability for the first time.

After cruising through the group stage, Lionel Scaloni's side struggled to impose themselves against Cape Verde, prompting debate over whether the performance was an isolated stumble or evidence of weaknesses that opponents can exploit.

"What worries me now is that there are only four days to rest, travel, many players were suffering from cramps, and now you play Egypt, who are also a very

physically strong team. I think they have a little more quality at the front than Cape Verde," former striker Sergio Aguerro said on ESPN Argentina.

Lionel Messi admitted after the Cape Verde match that he was tired and lamented Argentina's inability to press their opponents high up the pitch. Egypt are likely to draw encouragement from the way Cape Verde troubled the South Americans.

The North Africans relied heavily on their defensive organisation and looked to Mohamed Salah and Omar Marmoush to launch counter-attacks against Australia, an approach they could employ again against the holders.

For Egypt, a fully fit Salah could be crucial after the forward entered the Australia match with a hamstring concern and at times appeared reluctant to sprint at full speed during a draining 120-minute contest. Argentina, meanwhile, have publicly maintained their cautious tone.

"It will be a very difficult match," midfielder Leandro Paredes said. "We are at the elite level of football and all national teams are very good and physical."

The winner of the match in Atlanta will face Switzerland or Colombia in Kansas City on July 11.



Argentina's head coach Lionel Scaloni gives instructions to forward Lionel Messi and defender Cristian Romero during a training session yesterday, ahead of the FIFA World Cup 2026 round of 16 match against Egypt at Kennesaw State University in Kennesaw, Georgia. (AFP)



## CRICKET

# Title win vindicates Molineux's self-belief

AFP  
London

Australia captain Sophie Molineux was glad to have "kept believing" after her side thrashed England by seven wickets in the women's T20 World Cup final at Lord's on Sunday.

Molineux's team were utterly dominant, keeping things tight in the field, with the left-arm spinner's 1-32 not fully reflective of how she helped restrict England after winning the toss.

Australia then chased down a modest target of 151 with 17 balls to spare.

Beth Mooney led Australia's chase with 64 - her fourth fifty in a major global final.

Doubts were expressed when injury-prone all-rounder Molineux, 28, was appointed Australia captain in January after all-time great Alyssa Healy announced her retirement.

And a back issue meant Molineux missed the end of the multi-

format series against India in February.

"Captaining a couple of games and getting injured, shock?" Molineux told a post-match press conference.

"I suppose there was a few doubts internally and a few doubts externally.

"But I think what maybe I've learnt over my journey so far is that you just have to keep believing. And I'm incredibly lucky that people believed in me."

Molineux added: "I think when I did miss those games at the start of the (Australian) summer after just being announced captain, it probably made me feel like it might not work out.

"But I just think I'm so incredibly lucky with the support I've had, not just over the last six months, but it's been 10 years in this team for Australia."

Molineux had spoken before the final of her childhood dream to watch a Test at Lord's, with her father.

Her parents, however, got to see Molineux lead Australia to victory



Australia's captain Sophie Molineux holds the trophy as Australia take a lap of honour after the ICC Women's T20 World Cup 2026 final against England at Lord's in London on Sunday. (AFP)

in a World Cup final in front of a capacity crowd of nearly 29,000 at the 'Home of Cricket' instead.

"I gave him (her father) a big hug before (the match). He's incredibly proud.

"It was pretty emotional as well.

It's just nice to have that moment with him and mum and my sister, Chloe."

**MOONEY'S 'NERVES OF STEEL'**  
Reflecting on the match itself, which saw Australia claim a

record-extending seventh title in 10 editions of the women's T20 World Cup, Molineux hailed wicketkeeper-batter Mooney as "probably the smartest cricketer I've ever played with".

"The way she can sum up situations and be able to grind out innings and at the same time, like today, she has got all the shots and is able to play freely," said Molineux.

"She's got nerves of steel, Moons," she added.

Turning to her side as a whole, Molineux said Australia had "generational talent" all way through from 20-year-old fast bowler Lucy Hamilton to veteran all-rounder Ellyse Perry.

Left-arm quick Hamilton, following several economical displays, took her first wicket of the tournament when she struck with just her second ball of the final to dismiss Amy Jones.

"She's really driven and the girls just love her," said Molineux of Hamilton.

"She's a country kid from Bundaberg.

"Her parents actually flew over

(for the final), they booked their ticket about 48 hours ago, it took them 47 hours to get here and now they're going to turn around tomorrow and go back," added Molineux with a smile.

"It's special for people like Lucy?"

England captain Nat Sciver-Brunt, meanwhile, denied her side had a mental block against Australia following another showpiece loss to their arch-rivals.

Australia have now won all seven of their World Cup final clashes against England, across both one-day international and T20 cricket.

England were also whitewashed 16-0 in the last multi-format Ashes in Australia.

But Sciver-Brunt, whose sedate 58 not out was the top score in England's 150-4, said history had played no part in Sunday's outcome.

"It's a World Cup final," she said. "A World Cup that has meant so much to us, so I think the over-riding feeling is that we've lost a World Cup final, not 'oh no, it's Australia again'."

## TOUR DE FRANCE

# Pogacar clinches stage three to take yellow jersey

VINGEGAARD FINISHES SECOND, CARAPAZ COMES IN THIRD



UAE Team Emirates - XRG's Tadej Pogacar celebrates on the podium after winning stage 3 of the Tour de France between Granollers to Les Angles in France yesterday. (Reuters)

Reuters  
Paris

Defending champion Tadej Pogacar's final attack paid off as the UAE Team Emirates-XRG rider won his first stage of this year's Tour de France on Monday, taking the overall lead from Jonas Vingegaard, who finished second.

Pogacar and Vingegaard are tied at eight hours, 46 minutes and 55 seconds after stage three, but Pogacar's bonus seconds and count-back put him in the lead as the four-time winner continues the hunt for his third straight Tour de France title.

Stage two winner and teammate Isaac del Toro led out Pogacar in the final kilometre and the Slovenian earned his 22nd Tour de France stage win with a lunge for the finish line after a gruelling 195.9-km mountainous ride in stage three.

"It's because of Isaac today, I got some extra power in the finale," said the 27-year-old Pogacar, praising his Mexican teammate.

"Actually in the middle of the stage we decided that it's possible to go for the stage win and I'm really, really happy that we started the tour like this and incredibly finished today."

Richard Carapaz came in third, while 19-year-old French debutant Paul Seixas claimed fourth place.

## GRUELLING MOUNTAIN RIDE

Officials barred the public from the finishing point of the mountain stage due to a forest fire in the region.

A scorching sun bore down on the riders as they started the journey from Spain's Granollers in temperatures of more than 35 degrees Celsius.



Team Visma | Lease a Bike's Danish rider Jonas Vingegaard cycles past the finish line to take second place in the 3rd stage of the 113th Tour de France yesterday. (AFP)

Despite the heat, early breakaway attempts pushed the peloton, with Vingegaard covering 43.6km in the first hour.

Bruno Armirail, wearing the number 13 bib upside down to ward off bad luck, was in a crash with a few others at the front of the bunch shortly after the stage started. Frenchman Armirail suffered injuries to his right arm and leg, but everyone quickly got back on their bikes.

Frenchman Alex Baudin (EF Education-EasyPost) led a breakaway group of six ahead of the 9.3-km climb to Col de Toses, and was the first to reach the summit.

As the race entered France, Baudin stayed in the lead to be the first at Col du Calvaire, en-

suring he would take the polka-dot jersey from Alex Molenaar.

The peloton caught Baudin in the final 12 kilometres, as UAE Team Emirates-XRG riders set the pace, positioning three riders in front of Del Toro and Pogacar.

In the final kilometre, Sepp Kuss and Del Toro led out teammates Vingegaard and Pogacar. Pogacar pulled ahead of Dane Vingegaard to make a solo finish, eliminating the lead the two-time champion had enjoyed after stage two.

The race will continue today with a 181.9-km ride from Carcassonne to Foix, during which temperatures are forecast to reach 41 degrees Celsius amid a heatwave.

## Top Asian honour for Qatar's Younousse and Tijan



Qatar's Cherif Younousse and Ahmad Tijan won the 'Best Men's Beach Volleyball Players in Asia' award, in the first edition of the Asian Volleyball Confederation Awards (AVC Gala 2026), in recognition of the outstanding results they achieved during the season. The Qatari duo were chosen after their outstanding performances in various continental and international competitions and their continued success in achieving positive results that have strengthened the position of Qatari beach volleyball on both the Asian and global stages. Younousse and Tijan are scheduled to officially receive the award during the AVC Gala 2026, which will be held in Bangkok, Thailand, on August 8, in the presence of a select group of stars and officials from across Asia, to celebrate the most prominent individual and team achievements.

## MATCH REPORT

## Zimbabwe hold off Bangladesh for win

Reuters  
Harare

Zimbabwe won a low-scoring first one-day international against Bangladesh by 25 runs yesterday as captain Richard Ngarava led the way.

He took 3-31 as Zimbabwe bowled Bangladesh out for 116 in 33.1 overs, successfully defending a paltry total of 140 scored in 36.4 overs after being put into bat at the Harare Sports Club.

Nahid Rana took a career best 6-21 as Bangladesh made short work of the home side but then ended on the losing side as the

tourists lost three quick wickets and also saw their last five wickets go cheaply.

On top of his three-wicket haul, Ngarava (27) was also involved in a 63-run ninth-wicket partnership with top scorer Newman Nyamhuri (33) that lifted Zimbabwe from deep trouble at 70-8.

The second ODI is set to be played at the Harare Sports Club on Thursday.

## BRIEF SCORES

**Zimbabwe 141** (Nyamhuri 33, Ngarava 27, Rana 6-21, Taskin 2-32) **beat Bangladesh 116** (Nurul 31, Ngarava 3-31, Evans 3-34, Nyamhuri 2-22, Muzarabani 2-24) **by 25 runs**

## FOCUS

## England's Sciver-Brunt does not want Twenty20 World Cup to be her last

Reuters  
London

England captain Nat Sciver-Brunt said she does not want Sunday's defeat by Australia in the women's Twenty20 World Cup final to be her last appearance at one of cricket's showpiece events.

England lost by seven wickets at a sold-out Lord's as Australia chased down a victory target of 151 with 17 balls to spare.

Sciver-Brunt, 33, overcame a calf injury during the tournament to help England beat South Africa in the semi-finals with an innings of 75, but was unable to make a decisive impact in the final despite scoring another half-century.

Asked in the post-match press conference whether the tournament could be her last World Cup,



she replied, "No, I haven't thought about that. I don't want it to be my last World Cup. I don't even know when the next one is. I'm living day by day at the moment."

The next women's T20 World Cup will be held in 2028, with the next one-day international edition coming in 2029.

TENNIS

# Cobolli and Paolini reach Wimbledon quarter-finals

Local favourite Fery outlasts fellow wildcard Dimitrov as dark horses Noskova, Mertens and Kostyuk win

Reuters  
London

**E**ffervescent Italians Flavio Cobolli and Jasmine Paolini lit up the lawns of Wimbledon and returned to the quarter-finals, while British fans uncorked the champagne after Arthur Fery outlasted fellow wildcard Grigor Dimitrov yesterday.

After losing the Roland Garros final to Alexander Zverev, Cobolli continued his fine Grand Slam form by beating Australian fifth seed Alex de Minaur 7-5 7-6(4) 6-3 on a blazing afternoon on Court One, where play was twice halted when fans fell ill.

The ninth seed kept his cool in tense moments and unleashed his big shot-making - impressing with a spinning forehand winner deep in the second set - to see off his determined opponent and then looked to beat the heat with some ice cream.

**COBOLLI FINDS HIGH LEVEL**

"I feel great. It was an incredible match for me. I think I played one of the best matches, especially on this surface that is always tough to play on," Cobolli told reporters.

"Today I found a way to have a high level for, I don't know how much I played, but for all the match ... I'm proud and happy to reach a second quarter-final in a row here at Wimbledon. That means a lot for me.

"I played for my first time here on Court One. The feeling on the court was incredible. I love to play there.

"The sound was amazing and amazing feeling with the ball."



Italy's Jasmine Paolini celebrates after winning her fourth-round match against Philippines' Alexandra Eala at Wimbledon yesterday. **Right:** Britain's Arthur Fery reacts during his match against Bulgaria's Grigor Dimitrov on the eighth day of the 2026 Wimbledon Championships. (Reuters)



**DE MINAUR LEFT DISTRAUGHT**  
The end of De Minaur's bid to reach an eighth Grand Slam quarter-final, and hopes of finally crossing that hurdle, left the 27-year-old deeply disappointed.

"I think breaking it down into possibly simpler terms, I think one of us went out to win the match, and the other went out not to lose the match," De Minaur said.

"I think it's pretty self-explanatory who was who. It breaks me inside. That's the reality of it. Many, many hours gets put into my craft and countless years to have moments like these. To not step up to the plate, it's gut wrenching."

Cobolli's compatriot Paolini ended fellow crowd favourite Alexandra Eala's trailblazing Wimbledon run with a 6-4 4-6 6-3 victory over the Filipina on Centre Court to

stay on track for another deep run after her 2024 runner-up finish.

The 13th seed's Wimbledon participation was hampered due to a foot injury that has dogged her season but she said she was rediscovering her joy for tennis again at a venue where she has enjoyed great support. "I'm enjoying playing tennis. Of course, it's easier when you play well. But I think it's important to try to keep this mindset, even when things are tougher," Paolini said.

**KOSTYUK KEEPS COOL TO WIN**  
Paolini will face another big test when she meets Ukrainian 12th seed Marta Kostyuk, who began the eighth day's proceedings with a 6-4 6-4 win over American qualifier Ashlyn Krueger on Court Two as the heat began to

make life uncomfortable.

After a heatwave last week, which broke British records for June at around 37 degrees Celsius (98 degrees Fahrenheit), the second week of the tournament is forecast to see temperatures climb again beyond 30 degrees Celsius.

"It was a pretty stressful match for me because I was the one coming into this match with being a favourite with such a good opportunity, playing for the first quarter-final here in Wimbledon," Kostyuk said. "Of course, there was more pressure. I think just all these things kind of connected. For sure the heat didn't help."

**LAST BRIT FERY STAYS AFLOAT**  
Former Australian Open champion on Madison Keys joined Krueger in going out the exit door following

a 6-4 7-6(2) loss to rising Czech Linda Noskova, who reached the last eight of the Grand Slam for the first time.

The 21-year-old Noskova, who is eager to follow in the footsteps of her champion compatriots Petra Kvitová, Marketa Vondroušová and Barbora Krejčíková, will face Elise Mertens after the Belgian beat Czech Marie Bouzková 6-4 6-4.

Local fans were in for a treat in the evening when Fery fought past Dimitrov 7-5 3-6 4-6 6-4 7-6(10-7) in nearly four hours to continue his extraordinary journey as the last remaining Briton in the singles draw. Taylor Fritz made swift work of Kazakh 10th seed Alexander Bublik 7-6(1) 6-4 6-4 to reach the quarter-finals for the fourth time in five years at the All England Club.



Czech Republic's Linda Noskova celebrates after winning her fourth round match against Madison Keys of the US. (Reuters)

SPOTLIGHT

## Domenicali keen to restore cancelled Gulf Grand Prix

AFP  
Silverstone, United Kingdom

**F**ormula 1 president **Stefano Domenicali** says he wants to restore to this season's calendar at least one of the two races in the Middle East which were cancelled because of the war in the region.

The two rounds scheduled for Bahrain and Jeddah in April were scrapped following the attack by the USA and Israel on Iran which spilled over to all the Arab Gulf states.

"If there is something that we can announce also related to the possibility of seeing if there is any space for what has not been done so far, we're going to do it, in the right moment and the right conditions," the Italian told UK broadcaster *Sky Sport*.

"That is really the hope, because if all the



conditions are right, we're going to go ahead with our plan. If there is a chance, why not?" Domenicali did not say which of the two cancelled races would be reinstated, but *Sky Sports* suggested Bahrain would be slotted

in at the beginning of October between Baku and Singapore. The decision would need to be taken before the August summer break for logistical reasons, Domenicali said.

The last two rounds of this F1 season, which currently has only 22 races, are also scheduled for the Gulf with Qatar followed by the season-closer in Abu Dhabi in December.

The F1 boss said he hoped they would go ahead.

"Our duty is to make sure we are ready to run our calendar as it is planned," he said.

"And we are monitoring the situation because it would be an incredibly positive message for sport, and also politically, that we are moving in this direction, because if this is happening, it is something we can say is behind us."

The United States and Iran are engaged in negotiations aimed at bringing a lasting end to the war in the Middle East.

MOTORSPORT

## KTM sign Alex Marquez on multi-year deal

Reuters  
Madrid

**K**TM have signed Alex Marquez of Spain and Italy's Fabio Di Giannantonio on multi-year deals from 2027, the team said yesterday.

Marquez, 30, was runner-up in the 2025 MotoGP championship. He will leave Gresini Racing after four seasons and return to a factory team for the first time since his rookie campaign with Honda in 2020.

"Alex brings not only outstand-

ing skill and race intelligence but also determination and a winning mindset that perfectly matches our DNA," KTM Motorsports Director Pit Beirer said in a statement. Fabio Di Giannantonio, 27, is currently third in the MotoGP championship standings. He will leave VR46 at the end of the season after joining the team in 2024, having claimed his second career MotoGP win in Barcelona this season.

"Fabio has clearly made a step to become one of the consistent front-running guys in MotoGP. We cannot question his speed and commitment to delivering the best performance," Beirer said.

GOLF

## Harrington captures 3rd US Senior Open title

Reuters  
Columbus, Ohio

**P**draig Harrington rather enjoys setting records.

The 2024 inductee to the World Golf Hall of Fame tied Miller Barber by winning his third US Senior Open at Scioto Country Club in Columbus, Ohio.

Harrington shot a Sunday-best round of 4-under-par 66 and finished at 12-under 268, four strokes ahead of Stewart Cink and six better than George McNeill.

Harrington also defended his title from a year ago, when he won at The Broadmoor in Colorado Springs. The Irishman captured his first US Senior Open crown in 2022.

"I like creating records, and to be part of that is a big deal," said Harrington. "It just goes to show how hard it is."

The 54-year-old already sees younger players like Cink and Zach Johnson emerging on the scene and understands he has limited time to gather more hardware.

"Now I'm seeing guys coming along, and I'm kind of realizing there is only a window to win these tournaments," Harrington said. "They have told me, other players, that it's kind of up to about 56, 57, then it starts going downhill pretty quickly."



Pdraig Harrington of Ireland poses with The Francis D. Ouimet Memorial Trophy after winning the US Senior Open Championship 2026 at Scioto Country Club in Columbus, Ohio. (AFP)

Harrington trailed Cink by one stroke entering the final round, but took the lead with birdies on the first two holes and never looked back. Harrington birdied the par-4, 470-yard second hole by hitting his approach to 3 feet and sinking the putt. Cink could not reach the green from a fairway bunker and ended up making a bogey for a two-shot swing. Cink also bogeyed the third hole, giving Harrington a three-stroke lead. Harrington momentarily stumbled, bogeying No. 5, but birdied Nos. 6 and 8 to gain complete control with a four-stroke advantage.

### TWO WINS IN THREE RACES BUT FERRARI BOSS VASSEUR PLAYS DOWN F1 TITLE BID

Ferrari's Lewis Hamilton in action during the British Grand Prix at Silverstone Circuit on Sunday.



**LONDON:** Ferrari boss **Fred Vasseur** refused to talk up his team's Formula One championship chances even as they celebrated a second win in the space of three races. The Italian team have not won a title since 2008 but are now 78 points behind Mercedes in the constructors' standings while seven-time world champion Lewis Hamilton is third overall and 32 points behind leader Kimi Antonelli of Mercedes. Charles Leclerc, who won Sunday's British Grand Prix a month after teammate Hamilton won in Spain, is fourth and 39 points adrift of his teammate. "Championship fight is your words," Vasseur said when asked about what is shaping up to be a Mercedes versus Ferrari battle at the top and the gap shrinking, although neither Ferrari was on the podium in Austria between the wins.

"After Barcelona I had the comment that Ferrari is back in the championship. I said no. The week after you told me that Ferrari is nowhere. I said no.



"I will have exactly the same approach with everybody at home, even if I won't be in the office tomorrow," he said. "To say: 'Guys, we did a good weekend. Now let's be focused on Spa. It's not that we are champions. We are not nowhere. We are improving step by step but it is

like it is.'" The Belgian Grand Prix at Spa-Francorchamps is next up, with Leclerc a winner there in 2019 - a different era before the current engines - and Hamilton also triumphant on previous visits with Mercedes and McLaren. Vasseur felt Mercedes, winners of seven of nine Grands Prix and on pole position in all, still had a small advantage on pure performance even if Ferrari looked strong at the start and on race pace. Hamilton and Leclerc both felt they could take the fight to Ferrari and Mercedes boss Toto Wolff agreed they were strong rivals and could be expected to remain so for the rest of the season.

George Russell, a lucky second on Sunday after the safety car played into his hands and Antonelli suffered a mechanical problem and failed to score, said Ferrari were clearly in the hunt. "These Ferrari guys look really quick. So, yeah, game on," said the Briton.



## FOCUS

# Tuchel hails England's 'heroic' win, Henderson injury mars joy

BELLINGHAM POWERS 10-MAN ENGLAND PAST MEXICO, INTO WORLD CUP QUARTER-FINALS

AFP

Mexico City

England boss Thomas Tuchel said a thrilling 3-2 win over Mexico at the Estadio Azteca felt like winning a final as they overcame huge adversity to reach the World Cup quarter-finals.

Led by a double from Jude Bellingham and Harry Kane's penalty, the Three Lions shrugged off the effects of playing at high altitude, a frenzied home support for the co-hosts and playing for over 45 minutes with 10 men.

"I felt in the build up it never felt like round a 16 match. It feels almost like we won a final this last moment the referee takes the whistle to his mouth," said Tuchel. "Forty or 50 minutes in altitude against a home country, this is a moment of joy. A heroic performance and a heroic result in the end."

"So happy for the players, but also for me, to be part of this and live this experience. Such a special moment and to overcome it against all adversity is very special."

However, a historic night ended with a sour note for Tuchel by an injury suffered by Jordan Henderson from falling over an advertising board in the post-match celebrations. The former Liverpool captain, who was an unused substitute, has been taken to hospital with a wrist injury that puts his participation in the rest of the tournament at risk.

"I'm exhausted and emotional," added Tuchel. "Jordan injured his wrist, it just doesn't fit to the

evening that Jordan is not with us. "I don't know the procedure, the doctor told me he is in the hospital."

Victory also laid to rest some of England's demons from defeat to Argentina at the Azteca in the World Cup quarter-final 40 years ago. Diego Maradona famously punched the ball into the net before going on to score an incredible solo goal in a 2-1 win.

Defending champions Argentina and England could be on a collision course in the semi-finals, but for now Tuchel is refusing to look beyond Norway, who stunned Brazil earlier on Sunday thanks to Erling Haaland's double.

"I will not talk about the semi-final when I am just into the quarter-final. Now we have the chance for some days off," he added.

"I will go one full day without football and then we will look at Norway. We had a very sad story with this stadium, we make peace with it today."

After Bellingham's first half brace, scored 95 seconds apart, Julian Quinones rifled Mexico back into the contest.

A red card for Jarell Quansah after a VAR review looked to have swung momentum Mexico's way.

But Kane quickly restored England's two-goal lead from the spot before he was then punished for a Mexico penalty, converted by Raul Jimenez. "Referees are just not good enough. The fourth officials are just not good enough. That's the bottom line," raged Tuchel. "VAR overturns a clear and obvious error for the (Mexico) penalty. Was it a clear and obvious error? I think not."



(From Left) England's forward Anthony Gordon, midfielder Elliot Anderson, defender Reece James, midfielder Jude Bellingham and forward Harry Kane celebrate after winning the World Cup round of 16 match against Mexico at the Mexico City Stadium in Mexico City. (AFP)

## Bellingham tells England to believe after Mexico masterclass

Jude Bellingham told his England teammates they can be world champions after leading by example in a 3-2 win over Mexico that will go down as one of the Three Lions' best ever World Cup triumphs.

The odds were stacked against Thomas Tuchel's men as they entered the lion's den of the Estadio Azteca, where Mexico had only lost twice in 89 previous matches and never in 10 outings at the World Cup. On top of facing down a passionate 80,000 crowd, England also had to cope with playing at high altitude and over 45 minutes a man down after Jarell Quansah's red card. But by that point, Bellingham's first half double, scored just 98 seconds apart, had given the visitors something to hold on to.

The Real Madrid midfielder stooped to silence the home crowd to open the scoring. Bellingham then charged forward to convert Harry Kane's cross for his fourth goal of the tournament. "It's the best night of my England career. Just unbelievable," said Bellingham, who also performed heroics in his own box.

After Julian Quinones smashed Mexico back into the game, Cesar Montes looked certain to equalise before half-time until Bellingham stretched out a leg to clear. At just 23, Bellingham is already into his fourth major tournament and assumed the role of a leader.

Alongside Kane, England's two world class players have carried their nation into a last-eight clash with Norway despite far from flawless performances.

"I'm aware of the responsibility, I'm aware of the pressure that I carry along with all the other players," said Bellingham.

"Each player has a different responsibility on the pitch in terms of their roles, but I know what I can offer to the team." He is hoping his confidence rubs off on the rest of the squad in their quest to end a 60-year wait to win a major tournament.

"I'm convinced of it and I hope that a win like this can give them that same conviction that they're top players and we shouldn't fear anyone."

"We shouldn't wait 40 minutes, 50 minutes, 60 minutes to realise that we're a very good team."

"So I hope that this win instills that belief in the squad because they deserve to feel that way about themselves."

Bellingham's brilliance since touching down on the other side of the Atlantic has silenced doubts prior to the World Cup that he would not necessarily start under Thomas Tuchel. A year ago Tuchel said that even his own mother found some of Bellingham's antics "repulsive" and that he could intimidate his own teammates.

The German called on those at home to revel in the glory of a



England's midfielder Jude Bellingham celebrates scoring his team's first goal during the World Cup round of 16 match against Mexico at the Mexico City Stadium in Mexico City. (AFP)

in a player labelled a generational talent since he broke into the Birmingham team as a 16-year-old. Bellingham has already experienced the pain of coming close, but ultimately missing out at major tournaments.

England have lost in both the last two finals of the European Championship and were narrowly beaten by France in the World Cup quarter-finals four years ago. The final whistle in Mexico City went at just over 4:00 am (0300GMT) back in England, but Bellingham called on those at

home to revel in the glory of a memorable night. "To be a part of an England team that gives so much to the country that can give them these moments and nights like this means just as much as anything in my career and in my life really," he added. "Kids stay off school, parents don't go to work, enjoy the day. Be with your friends, go down the pub again if you can. "Enjoy it because these nights don't come around often." England will hope Bellingham has three more nights like this in him to finally bring the World Cup home.



England's German head coach Thomas Tuchel and midfielder Jude Bellingham celebrate after winning against Mexico at the Mexico City Stadium in Mexico City. (AFP)

## PREVIEW

## Switzerland expect toughest challenge yet from Colombia

Reuters

Vancouver

Switzerland are preparing for a fiery contest on and off the pitch against Colombia as they gear up for what they expect to be their toughest test of the tournament in today's World Cup round-of-16 clash, midfielder Ardon Jashari said.

Having experienced a hostile atmosphere in their 2-1 group-stage victory over co-hosts Canada, Jashari expects an equally passionate challenge from Colombia's supporters as Switzerland chase a place in the quarter-finals. "I think we felt it the most against Canada - 90% of the stadium was from Canada. I think this time it will be a little bit more special," Jashari told reporters.

"The Colombians are not only emotional on the pitch, but also in the stands. I think we also had that at the World Cup in Qatar with Brazil. Now it's just another situation. We are in a knockout phase. It will certainly be a hot game, even in the stands."

While Colombia present a formidable obstacle, Jashari said the Swiss were focused on produc-



Switzerland's Johan Manzambi during a training session in Vancouver yesterday. (Reuters)

ing their best performance rather than dwelling on who might be favourites.

Competing at their sixth successive World Cup, Switzerland's consistency in qualifying has been matched by the predictability of their exits, with progress beyond the round of 16 proving an enduring issue.

They were eliminated at that stage in 2006, 2014, 2018 and 2022, and a group-stage exit in 2010 remains the lone exception in an otherwise consistent run to the knockout rounds.

Swiss forward Ruben Vargas, who has contributed two goals and one assist in four appear-

ances at the tournament, highlighted the impact of 20-year-old teammate Johan Manzambi.

Manzambi was central to Switzerland's 2-0 round-of-32 win over Algeria, a result that ended the nation's 88-year wait for a World Cup knockout victory. The forward has scored three goals and provided two assists in four matches at the tournament.

"I think we all saw what he's capable of with his age," Vargas, 27, said. "I think it's not normal really that he does things already helping us with goals and assists. I really see a bright future for him and we are really happy to have him in our team."

## SPOTLIGHT

## Neymar calls time on Brazil career after World Cup elimination

AFP

East Rutherford, United States

Brazil superstar Neymar indicated on Sunday that his international career was over after the five-time World Cup winners went out of the tournament in the last 16 at the hands of Norway.

Neymar came on as a late substitute at the MetLife Stadium and scored a penalty deep in injury time, but that was a mere consolation after Erling Haaland netted twice for Norway, and Brazil lost 2-1. The 34-year-old is Brazil's all-time top scorer and ironically he got his first goal for his country in the same stadium, in a 2-0 win against the United States back in 2010.

"I tried and I tried. Now it's over. It began here and it ends here," Neymar said in a brief exchange with a journalist from Brazil's Globo Esporte after the game.

He collapsed in tears when the final whistle went, and had to be consoled by teammates.

Worn down by injuries in recent years, the former Barcelona and Paris Saint-Germain player, now back at first club Santos, was a surprise inclusion in Carlo Ancelotti's Brazil squad for the World Cup. Injury prevented him from



Brazil's forward Neymar reacts after losing the 2026 World Cup round of 16 match against Norway at the New York/New Jersey Stadium in East Rutherford. (AFP)

featuring in Brazil's first two group games at the tournament, but he did come on in the 3-0 win over Scotland in Miami which completed the opening round. That

was his first international appearance since October 2023, but his only other appearance in the United States came Sunday against Norway.